

ADDRESS BY GEORGE BIZOS AT THE INAUGURAL MEETING TO FORM THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMITTEE FOR THE RESTITUTION OF THE PARTHENON MARBLES

We do not speak about the Elgin Marbles but of the Parthenon Marbles. We do not wish to speak ill of Lord Elgin (Thomas Bruce) but let us read the great Philhellen's Lord George Byron the angry words in Childe Harold about Lord Elgin

“ But who, of all the plunderers of yon fane
On high, where Pallas linger'd, loth to flee
The latest relic of her ancient reign;
The last, the worst, dull spoiler, who was he?
Blush, Caledonia! Such thy son could be!
England! I joy no child he was of thine:
Thy free-born men should spare what once was free;
Yet they could violate each saddening shrine,
And bear these altars o'er the long-reluctant brine.”

“Come then ye classic Thieves of each degree,
Dark Hamilton and sullen Aberdeen,
Come pilfer all that pilgrims love to see,
All that yet consecrates the fading scene:
Ah! better were it ye had never been
Nor ye nor Elgin nor that lesser wight
The victim sad of vase-collecting spleen
House furnisher withal one Thomas hight
Than ye should bear one stone from wronged Athena's site.”

And the Curse of Minerva

“Daughter of Jove! In Britain’s injured name,
A true-born Briton may the deed disclaim.
Frown not on England; England owns him not:
Athena, no! thy plunderer was a Scot
....
And well I know within that bastart land
Hath Wisdom’s goddess never held command.”

We quote the harsh words to show that the controversy is not new. We know that many Scots support the call for the Restitution of the Marbles. We thank them for their support.

The modern Greek state is the successor in title to the territory of Greece that was under control of the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 19th Century and where the marbles were located prior to their removal by Lord Elgin. Greece believes that it is legally entitled to the return of the Parthenon marbles. Furthermore, it has a clear interest in its cultural heritage, as is reflected in Law 30228 on the Protection of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage in General. In particular, that law makes clear that Greece has a duty, to itself and to its citizens, “to care, within the context of international law, for the protection of cultural objects, which are connected historically with Greece wherever they are located. We will discuss the conflict between the Basic Law of Greece with a statute passed by the House of Commons in 1816.

The marbles that are the subject of this memorandum adorned the Parthenon, on the Acropolis in Athens.

They were removed between 1801 and 1810 from the sites at which they were located by Lord Elgin, a Scottish Earl who was at the time the British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire.

The last of the marbles were finally removed from Greek territory in 1810 and were taken by Lord Elgin back to Britain.

In 1816 Lord Elgin sought to sell the marbles to the British government. The government, which was interested in making the purchase, conducted a parliamentary enquiry into the question whether Elgin had had permission to remove the marbles. Having satisfied itself that Elgin indeed had permission, Parliament resolved to purchase the marbles from Elgin. We will show that the majority of the house was misled by Elgin and his friends.

In 1816, Parliament passed an Act that vested the ownership of the marbles in the British Museum. The marbles have been housed there ever since.

As will be seen below, it is our opinion that there may well be a case to be made against the current possessors of the marbles for their return. In our view, the most effective potential cause of action would be based on the principles of private law and would be litigated by means of an action launched in the English Courts, applying the accepted rules of private international law (conflict of laws). The strongest arguments are those

based on a consideration of, and challenge to, the legality of the original acquisition of the marbles by Lord Elgin at the turn of the 19th Century.

It must be emphasised, however, that this is a *prima facie* view based only on the information available to us at this time and that the following issues need to be borne in mind in further considering the viability of any litigation. Much of the information was written up in early 20th century by Arthur Hamilton Smith.

Two points about Smith's article, must, however, be recognised:

First, Smith's work was conducted at the specific request of a descendant of the 7th Earl of Elgin, and may for that reason be regarded with some suspicion as to whether it does indeed present the facts "warts and all" as suggested by Christopher Hitchens. In fact, Hitchens himself refers to one instance in which Smith's transcription of a specific letter excludes important information which would tend to support the argument in favour of the return of the marbles.

Secondly, the factual research undertaken by Smith in preparing the article can in no way be regarded as effective *legal* research, aimed at uncovering facts that would be relevant to the specific causes of action considered in this memorandum.

In view of the difficulties associated with finally determining the true facts of the matter, it needs to be emphasised that our view is that the success of any contemplated litigation will depend very heavily on the plaintiff being able to prove the correctness of the facts that we have accepted. In order to do so, it will be necessary for an investigation of similar rigour to that of Smith to be undertaken, not only to test the

validity of his factual conclusions against the original documents upon which they are based but also to see whether any further evidence may be unearthed that would support Greece's claims. While it is perhaps unfortunate that this exercise would probably not be able to be undertaken prior to the launch of proceedings owing to the expected unwillingness of the current holders of the relevant material to release them for this purpose, the availability of procedures of discovery and subpoenas in trial proceedings is in fact one of the key reasons why we believe that it would be desirable to litigate this matter in that form in the Courts, as opposed to via any other proposed extra- or semi-curial approach.

Of potential relevance here is the question of any applicable statute of limitations ("prescription"). Even if such a defence were to be available (a matter which we would wish to study in greater detail at a later stage), it remains to be seen whether the current possessors of the marbles would be willing to risk the public moral outcry that cynical reliance on a technical defence of this nature would undoubtedly provoke. The technical defenses may succeed in the English Courts. They are more likely to fail in the European or International Court. If the case fails before the Court, the international Jury when the facts are established will surely go the other way.

This memorandum is based on an approach in terms of which Greece would seek relief from a British court in terms of the law of England. England is, of course, the jurisdiction in which the property is located and it therefore the appropriate jurisdiction in which to institute an action. Our *prima facie* view is that, in terms of the private international law currently applied in England, the court will be required to apply the law applicable in

Greece at the time of the dispossession. This is also a well-accepted principle. Indeed, in the recent case of *Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran v Barakat Galleries Ltd* the parties accepted that the dispute had to be determined according to the law of Iran at the time of the removal of antiquities from that country, “being the *lex situs* of the antiquities at the time of derivation of such title”. This case is the most recent example of the application of this essentially trite principle.

While we have considered the factual bases for arguments to the effect that Elgin did not have the right to remove the marbles, we have relied exclusively and uncritically upon the work of Rudenstine and Demetriades in relation to the law applicable in Greece at the time of the marbles’ removal. A full consideration of the legal framework will be necessary before a claim may proceed. We have been assured by his excellency the High Commissioner of Pakistan Ashraf Qureshi that there is no shortage of scholars in his and other countries familiar with law that prevailed in Greece at the time the Marbles were removed.

THE VALIDITY OF THE “FIRMAN”

Those who argue that the removal by Elgin of the marbles was lawful rely on the issuance, by the Ottoman authorities, of a ‘firman’ that was presented to the authorities in Athens on 23 July 1801. It is our view that there are a range of arguments that could potentially be raised that contradict the view that Elgin was authorised, through a ‘firman’, to remove the marbles. In short, these arguments are:

That the document on which Elgin relied was not in fact a 'firman' but was simply a letter setting out the recommendation of the writer. The letter was purportedly signed by Kaimmakam Seyid, Abdullah Pasha, the Deputy to the Grand Vizier or Yusuf Ziyauddin Pasha (then currently in charge of the Ottoman army fighting the French in Egypt), whereas only the Sultan, according to this argument, could give authority for the removal of items from the Parthenon; and

That the English document commonly relied upon to support Elgin's claim was in fact a distorted translation of an Italian translation of the original Ottoman document. On this argument, the document has even less weight when considering whether it did indeed grant the required authority to remove all or any of the marbles.

We proceed to deal with each in turn.

We begin by setting out, briefly, the argument that the "firman" was not in fact a 'firman':

It must be emphasised that the Ottoman empire was a theocracy. There was no legislative body and the law in force was sharia. The Sultan alone was authorised to interpret the sharia law to the extent that it was inadequately expressed and to issue decrees to the extent that they were not inconsistent with sharia. This latter power was expressed in the issuance of 'firmans'.

Therefore, if the Sultan had issued a firman to Elgin authorising him to remove the marbles, there would be strong support for the view that the act of removal was legal (subject to the additional arguments discussed below). However, a case could be made out that the 'firman' allegedly relied upon was not in fact a 'firman'.

According to Professor Demetriades of University of Crete, a valid 'firman' would have had the following features:

"It would have contained a "tougras", which was the emblem of the Sultan. Only the Sultan could issue a 'firman'.

It would have begun with an "invocatio", an invocation to God.

It would have been headed with the Sultan's monogram.

It would have contained an "inscriptio", which would have mentioned the officials to whom it was addressed.

It would have contained various phrases that were contained only in 'firmans'. For example, the section containing the specific authority to perform the particular act would begin with the phrase "Upon arrival of the great imperial document, let it be known that . . .".

It would have ended with the date in Arabic set out in full.

It would never have mentioned the name of the drafter or editor because the document was written in the name of the Sultan alone.

As will be discussed in more detail below, the document upon which most modern historians rely in support of their view that Elgin had permission to remove the marbles was an English translation. The authenticity of the English document is open to serious doubt. However, even if one accepts that the English translation is an exact translation of the original document issued by the Ottoman authorities, the evidence would tend to

support the view that the document was an official letter, rather than a 'firman'. Its author was a high-ranking official in the army (specifically, the deputy to the Grand Vizier), who was present in Egypt fighting against the French army. As a result of the defeat by the British of the French, this letter was addressed to Elgin as a sign of gratitude. It did not, however, have the force of a law that would have applied to a 'firman'.

The second argument relating to the firman focuses on the translated document upon which Elgin relied in the hearing before Parliament in 1816. The argument is as follows:

There are potentially three documents upon which Elgin's claim to have received permission to remove the marbles is based. First, there is the original document that Elgin obtained from the Ottomans in Constantinople in 1801. It was referred to in the report of the parliamentary committee that investigated Elgin's claims in 1816. Secondly, there is a document in Italian that was revealed at the 1816 hearings by Philip Hunt, an assistant of Elgin's who was present with him in Constantinople. Hunt claimed that this document was a direct translation of the Ottoman 'firman' and that the translation had been done in Constantinople in July 1801. Thirdly, there is an English translation that was referred to in the 1816 parliamentary report, but which was in fact derived from Hunt's Italian document.

The original document is now lost, and was already lost by the time that parliament conducted its enquiry in 1816. No copy of this document has ever been found and there is no reference to it in the archives of the Ottoman Empire.

The circumstances surrounding the Italian document are somewhat suspicious: At the Parliamentary hearings, Elgin testified first. He was repeatedly asked whether he had written proof of having been given permission to remove the marbles. He answered that he had been given written permission but that he had not kept any of the documents given to him. He made no mention at all of an Italian translation of the original document.

Surely he would have treasured a proper 'firman' signed by the Snetan. Hunt was called as a witness towards the end of the hearings and made reference, for the first time, to the Italian translation. Despite the clear incentive that Elgin had to fabricate the existence of an authentic translation of the original document (because he desperately needed to sell the marbles he was about to be declared bankrupt and Parliament was eager to be satisfied that he had received permission to remove them), the Committee accepted at face value the authenticity of the Italian document.

There are discrepancies between the Italian document (which has been rediscovered relatively recently) and the English translation relied upon by Parliament. These discrepancies undermine the claim that the Italian document is a translation of a firman giving permission to Elgin to remove the marbles.

If one believes the account provided in the report by the Parliamentary select committee, Hunt was in possession of an Italian translation of the original firman given in 1801. An English translation of that Italian document is annexed to the parliamentary report and it is upon the latter that those claiming that Elgin had authority to remove the marbles rely.

In the English translation of the document, there appears the following sentence: “We therefore have written this Letter to you, and expedited it by Mr Philip Hunt, an English Gentleman, Secretary of the Aforesaid Ambassador”. In the Italian version of the document, this sentence actually reads as follows: “We therefore have written this Letter to you, and expedited it by N. N.” It seems that the initials N.N. were used when the name of the person in question was to be inserted later.

The second discrepancy is as follows: In the English translation, it says at the bottom “Signed (with a signet) Seged Abdullah Kaimacan”. However, the Italian version of the document is not signed, with a signet or at all, by anyone, let alone Seged Abdullah Kaimacan.

The most plausible explanation of the nature of the document is that it was a document drafted by Pisani, Elgin’s negotiator and translator, which was to be presented to the authorities. In other words, it was a document that had been drafted by Elgin’s men in the hope that the authorities would approve its content and issue an official letter based on its text. However, the evidence seems compelling that the Italian document could not have been a translation of a ‘firman’ and was not even a final version of a letter.

ELGIN DID NOT HAVE PRIOR PERMISSION TO REMOVE THE MARBLES

Those that support the British Museum’s claim to the marbles tend to rely on the ‘firman’ as authority. This argument is to the effect that Elgin was given prior permission from the Ottomans to remove the marbles. However, even assuming that the document in

question was a valid 'firman', there are two bases upon which this argument may be disputed:

First, that the text of the purported 'firman' did not authorise the removal of the marbles; and

Secondly, that the Parliamentary Select Committee based its conclusion that Elgin had authority on ratification, implicitly accepting that Elgin had no prior authority.

Although there is cogent evidence, as described above, that the 'firman' was not in fact a 'firman', the present argument proceeds on the assumption that the 'firman' was a legally binding, valid document. In terms of the present argument, Elgin exceeded the terms of the 'firman' by doing more than what was authorised. In particular:

The English translation relied upon by Parliament lists the following activities to be conducted by Elgin's men: "Fixing scaffolding round the ancient Temple of the Idols there; and in moulding the ornamental sculpture and visible figures thereon, in plaster or gypsum; and in measuring the remains of other old ruined buildings there; and in excavating when they find it necessary the foundations, in order to discover inscriptions which may have been covered in rubbish . . . "

While these words clearly do not authorise removing marbles from the temple walls, the disputed document also says that no one was to "hinder [Elgin and his men] from taking away any pieces of stone with inscriptions and figures". This is the phrase relied upon to support the argument that the document gave Elgin permission to remove the marbles.

However,

“[b]y themselves these words fail to authorise removal of marble statuary from the Parthenon edifice. When they are read in the context of the entire document, the assertion that they permitted Lord Elgin to remove metopes, friezes and statues from the pediments is specious. If there is any doubt that the authority to remove ‘any pieces of stone with inscriptions and figures’ was limited to stones already on the ground or discovered while excavating, it vanishes because of a line in the middle of the second paragraph emphasising that the local Athens officials should honour the firman given to Lord Elgin ‘**particularly as there is no harm in the said figures and edifices being thus view, contemplated and designed.**”

There is therefore a strong argument that rebuts the assumption that the document authorised the removal of the marbles from the Parthenon and other temples. In fact, it is difficult to argue that the document is even ambiguous in this regard – it quite clearly did not grant the permission claimed.

The force of this argument is multiplied when it is considered that (on Smith’s version) at all times prior to about 23 May 1801 and “up to this point, no ambitious designs of collecting the marbles had taken shape” and, according to Elgin himself, testifying before the House of Commons Committee in 1816, it was only when he saw what he regarded as the growing and escalating destruction of the antiquities that he first even considered removing any of them:

“It was upon these suggestions and with these feelings, that I proceeded to remove as much of the sculpture as I conveniently could; it was no part of my original plan to bring away anything but my models”.

This is certainly consistent with all of the evidence that we have looked at. For example, the “twenty-two paragraphs” of instructions to the team of artists and architects drawn up by Elgin’s assistant, Hamilton, made mention only of measuring, drawing, searching for ruins, sketching and moulding.

The point to be made here is that, if the alleged firman was the result of the considerable pressure placed upon the Turkish authorities in Constantinople starting from as early as September 1800, it would not have been issued for the purpose of removing any sculptures but merely for the purposes of obtaining admission, making drawings, excavating and putting up scaffolding, which was the sole purpose of the whole exercise until barely a month before the so-called ‘firman’ was issued. It is noteworthy that as late as March 1801, Logotheti, the British Vice Consul in Athens was still writing to Elgin referring to the need for “a powerful letter of recommendation” just to do the architectural and artistic work, with no mention yet of the question of removal of objects. On 16 May 1801, Lusieri reported to Elgin that in the absence of a ‘firman’ the Disdar “prevented .. Feodor from drawing the bas-reliefs ... the architects from making new observations, and myself from taking views ... because they lack the necessary firman for that purpose. Everything that has been done up till now in the citadel has been by means of presents to the Disdar, who is the commandant. He, however, has been threatened by the Cadi and Voicode if he should continue to admit us to the

fortress, and has just told us that henceforth it was impossible for us to work there without a 'firman'. I therefore beg your excellency to have one sent to us as soon as possible, drawn up in such terms as to prevent us meeting with new difficulties in resuming and peaceably continuing our work". This would strongly suggest that the 'firman' obtained in late June or early July 1801, would have been limited to justifying the activities that the team were then undertaking and not directed towards removal of any items.

Furthermore, there are indications from the correspondence referred to by Smith that Elgin and his party did pretend not to understand the "firman" as giving them authority to remove antiquities from the Acropolis. In this regard,

We know from the documentation cited by Smith that the original intention was for Elgin's team to measure, draw and mould.

To the extent that Elgin planned to take any antiquities back to England, these were to be purchased legally.

In a letter to Elgin on 22 May 1801 (just before the "firman" was issued), Hunt reported:

"[Lusieri] is employing his pencil on two general views of Athens, one from the Pnyx, the other from Mount Anchesmus... . He has also commenced rear views of the Temples of Theseus, Minerva and Pandrosos. Positive firmans must, however, be obtained from the Porte, to enable the Architects and Modellers to proceed in their most interesting labours. ... Till those firmans are obtained, the bas-reliefs on the frieze and the Groupes on the Metopes can neither be modelled nor drawn. The architects therefore in the

mean time, are proceeding to make the elevations and ground plans, from the measures they had taken, and the Calmuc Theodore employs his almost magic pencil in copying such remains of sculpture as are beyond the walls of the Citadel”

This would suggest that the difficulties experienced by Elgin’s team that necessitated the grant of the firman were related to obtaining access to the Acropolis, as opposed to a desire at that stage to take away any antiquities.

It will be recalled that at this time, the Elgin party were having to make payments to the Athens authorities to enter the Acropolis. In the light of the comparison with the “streets of Athens” it is our view that the phrase “carry away whatever does not interfere with the works” would not suggest any power having been granted to actually remove parts of the buildings. Surely such conduct would not have been allowed in “the streets of Athens”? If more extensive powers (of removal) had been conferred, one might expect this to have been stated expressly here.

The final argument to be advanced in relation to the authority actually granted by the purported firman is the dispute over the correct translation of the Italian phrase “*qualche pezzi di pietra*”. Some scholars believe that the word “qualche” means “any”, whereas others allege that the true meaning is “some”, which would suggest a much more limited authority to gather “pieces of stone” at will.

THE OTTOMANS HAD NO POWER TO GIVE TITLE IN THE MARBLES

There are a range of arguments that might be advanced that relate to the authority of the Ottomans, or the particular officials that ostensibly gave authority, to permit Elgin to remove the marbles. A brief synopsis of these arguments is as follows:

To the extent that permission was indeed given to Elgin, it was given by officials who did not have the authority to give it. This argument is similar to the argument advanced above in respect of the firman. In terms of this argument, to the extent that Elgin was indeed authorised to remove the marbles, he was authorised to do so by persons who lacked the requisite authority.

A similar argument is to the effect that the Ottomans were bribed into giving permission and therefore the authority given was not lawful. This argument must be approached with caution. As argued above, it is well-accepted, both in terms of private and public international law, that the legality of the acquisition of title in property must be assessed by the law of the country in which the property is acquired at the time at which it was acquired. In terms of that approach, the validity of Elgin's acquisition of the marbles must be assessed according to the law in force in Greece at the time of the acquisition (i.e. between 1801 and 1810). Those that argue that the bribery of the Ottoman officials renders the permission that they gave nugatory, rely on the fact that, at the time, bribery was already proscribed by the law of England. While bribery may well have been the norm at the time in Athens, we cannot imagine that it would have actually been legal. However, the question would still arise whether proof of bribery could render the otherwise valid firman invalid – not to mention the further question that there is no indication in any of the evidence that we have obtained that the firman itself was

obtained by bribery, whereas it is quite clear that bribes were regularly paid to the local Athens officials such as the Disdar and Voivode.

The last of the arguments in regard to the authority of the Ottomans to give Elgin permission is of broader application. In terms of this argument, the Ottomans' military occupation of Greece did not give them authority to alienate the marbles. Once again, this argument should be approached with caution. It is based on developments in the law of occupation under public international law that have occurred in the 20th Century. On the assumption that the legality of the transfer must be assessed at the time at which it took place, it is difficult to argue that modern developments in the law of occupation may be applied retrospectively.

It must be noted that on two separate occasions (in 1804 and 1809) Ottoman officials condemned Elgin's conduct at the Acropolis, ordered Elgin's men to cease their work and complained that Elgin had no authority to do what he was doing. In 1809 Ottoman officials informed Robert Adair that Elgin had no authority to remove the marbles. These facts seem to contradict the notion that the Ottoman authorities ratified Elgin's conduct.

Byron is not the only harsh critic of Lord Elgin. Christopher Hitchens in the foreword to the 1987 edition to the "The Parthenon Marbles – The Case for Reunification" wrote:

"The term 'philhellene' is often used patronizingly in the English vernacular, as if it signified some slightly questionable Romantic addiction. I have been very impressed in the course of preparing this little book by the number of British people who, all down the generations since the marbles were removed, have

looked at the matter in a sober and phlegmatic way and concluded that a wrong has been done. In a mostly dispassionate manner they have sought for nearly two centuries to put it right, while much of the emotional flailing has been done by those who deny that there is any problem in the first place. The British Museum describes the Parthenon as a ruin and the Acropolis Museum praised by the world as a parking garage. I do not think that emotions should always be distrusted, so I hope that the ensuing pages are true to those who have insisted that the emotions of others matter as well. The prompting of justice, like the voice of reason, is quite but very persistent.”

In the chapter headed “The Parthenon in History” by Professor Robert Browning wrote:

“The Parthenon was built by Greeks and belongs to Greece. But it also, in a sense, belongs to the whole world.”

All the Greeks and more particularly the Athenians the temple of the goddess after which their city was named was what Pericles probably had in mind when he said in his funeral oration “We are lovers of beauty without extravagance”. He had the Parthenon in mind because he was the Archon of Athens when it was planned and built.

Even during the war of independence the Greeks offered the Turkish garrison encircled in the Parthenon who were short of bullets offered them theirs to stop them from melting down the metal joints in the columns.

It symbolized the democratic ideals of his city that have served as an example to all democrats throughout the ages to this very day including those fundamental human

rights which are enshrined in South Africa's Bill of Rights and Constitution. Richens unearthed a passage by General Makriyannis one of the heroes of the war of independence declared by the Greeks against the Ottoman Empire in 1821. Two of his soldiers were negotiating to sell two statues to foreign visitors. He took them aside and said "you must not give away these things, not even for *ten thousand talers*; you must not let them leave the country; it was for them we fought."

When the swastika, the fearful banner that the Nazis raised on the Acropolis the youthful Monoli Nglezos soon tore in down. His brave act is regarded as the first call for resistance of the occupation of Greece.

George Seferis the Nobel Prize winner for poetry said of these words:

"You see? It is not Lord Byron speaking, nor a great scholar nor an archaeologist. It is a shepherd's son from Roumelia, [General Makriyannis] his body covered with wounds. 'It was for them we fought'. There is more weight in this sentence of a simple man than in the effusions of fifteen gilded academics. Because it is only in feelings like this that the culture of a nation can be rooted – in real feelings, and not in abstractions about the beauty of our former ancestors or in hearts that have become dried up from a cataleptic fear of the common people". I don't apologise for being moved by such words.

Nobel laureate Odysseus Elytis told Colin MacInnes and ardent campaigner for the restoration of the marbles:

“When I saw the marbles at the British Museum, although without fanatical nationalist sentiment, I had a feeling of desolation – as if one saw someone in exile. Surely such things belong to one place only, where light and atmosphere are right. I think that in London, perhaps because of cleaning, they have yellowed, but believe that, if they return one day, the sun will restore to them their initial colour. I cannot say if eight million of us are all conscious of the matter, but am sure a great percentage are, and not only intellectuals but simple people. This is not only an aesthetic question, but a moral one. Of course I understand the difficulty, to you, of yielding. But to do so would be a victory for art for every country”.

The role of Melina Mercouri according to Hitchens broadened the debate that had been going on for almost two centuries.

“The restoration of democracy to Greece in 1974, and the renewal of cultural and political links consequent upon Greek accession to the European Community in 1981, gave the argument a new impetus. Despite the long history of the debate, it is probably true that most British people date their acquaintance with it from about a year after that, when Melina Mercouri began to make her name as Minister of Culture in the newly elected Socialist cabinet of Dr Andreas Papandreou”.

Richens has written:

“It is no insult to the memory of Mrs Mercouri to say that she added very little to an argument that has gone on steadily for nearly two centuries. But it is to her credit that the subject enjoys the enormous international attention that it has for perhaps the first time, attained”.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

It is said that it does not help to repeatedly knock on the door of the deaf. I am proud to being appointed as one of them. She was the first Honorary Ambassador of Hellenism. We who believe in the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles should say that if you knock often and hard enough you may eventually break it down. This is not an appeal for any unlawful action to be taken. Dialogue like many other Greek words in the English language including logic, ethics and other tools which civilized people and nations should employ so that just solutions may be achieved. Let the spirits of Pericles, Phideas, Socrates, Aristocle, Sophocles, Euripides, Makriyannis, Seferis, Elitys, Kazantzakis and so many others be appeased by restoring what belongs to Greece, to Athens and the Parthenon.

The Restoration of artifacts to their countries' of origin is not confined to the Parthenon Marbles.

Let us become well informed so that we may defeat the spurious arguments advanced by the British Museum and some of their apologists with arguments based on false assertions.

The obstinate NO! of the British Museum is not acceptable to the vast majority of the people of the world including the British. Let the apologists who say that it will never happen be reminded of the numerous assertions that the sun will never set on Britain's Empire. Let us often remind them that the times – they are changing!

We cannot guarantee success. But no one has been condemned for trying to do what is right.

I want to thank Professor Antony Snodgrass the chairman of the London Committee, Eleni Cubitt its secretary and members for inviting me to join them. They have inspired us to form the South African Committee. The director Professor Pandemalis and staff of the Acropolis Museum for showing me around shortly before its opening. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Culture and their representatives in London and Pretoria more particularly Aristidis Sandis the erstwhile Ambassador to South Africa for the help they have rendered to us. Richard Hitchens for his excellent book and his support. He is an acknowledged Philhellene. As is Nadine Gordimer for her Preface and support. Vias Kokkoris and other members of the Ad hoc Committee of the South African effort. Richard Moultrie and Adrian Friedman my colleagues at the Legal Resources Centre for doing most of the work on the Memorandum on which I heavily relied on in preparing this address. Thank you all in Saheti School for identifying yourselves with this effort. Keep it up!

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